



The Society of Thoracic Surgeons
633 N. St. Clair, Suite 2320
Chicago, IL 60611
www.sts.org

News

STS Press Release

Media Contact:

Jennifer Bagley

312-202-5865

jbagley@sts.org

For Immediate Release

Keith S. Naunheim Elected President of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons *Saint Louis University surgeon will focus on health care delivery and reimbursement*

FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA (January 29, 2018) – Cardiothoracic surgeon Keith S. Naunheim, MD, from the Saint Louis University (SLU) Medical Center, today was elected President of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons during the organization’s 54th Annual Meeting in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

“It means the world that my fellow surgeons think highly enough of me to elect me as STS President,” said Dr. Naunheim, the Vallee L. Melba Willman Professor and Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery at SLU. “I am flattered and gratified by their confidence, and I will work diligently to move the Society along the right path.”

The path to cardiothoracic surgery was not necessarily a straightforward and obvious one for Dr. Naunheim. With a knack for memorizing numbers and formulas, he was attracted to the discipline of physics and was convinced that a career as a physicist made sense. But after struggling through an advanced physics course during his freshman year at The Johns Hopkins University, he was given what his professor termed a “gift B” on the condition that he seek a more promising career choice. In reminiscing about his fondness for sciences in high school, Dr. Naunheim quickly realized that medicine might be a better choice. An interest in the world of medicine had been inspired by two part-time science instructors in his hometown high school in Saint Louis, Missouri. Ironically, those two teachers had day jobs as the chief of cardiology and the dean of the medical school at Saint Louis University—the institution where Dr. Naunheim has spent the last 33 years.

After graduating cum laude from Johns Hopkins, Dr. Naunheim was accepted to The University of Chicago School of Medicine, where he trained under Robert L. Replegle, MD, who would later become an STS President, and two other nationally recognized cardiothoracic surgeons, David B. Skinner, MD, and Tom R. DeMeester, MD. Following a general surgery internship and residency, as well as a fellowship in cardiothoracic surgery at The University of Chicago, Dr. Naunheim returned to his hometown in 1985 and joined the faculty at SLU, where he remains today.

An STS member since 1988, Dr. Naunheim has served on numerous committees and workforces; most recently, he was the Society’s Secretary and First Vice President. Dr. Naunheim also has chaired the Workforce on Nomenclature and Coding, the Council on Health Policy and Relationships, and the Workforce on Media Relations and Communications. In addition, he has held leadership positions in other cardiothoracic surgery organizations, including president of both the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association and the Saint Louis Thoracic Surgical Society.

As STS President, Dr. Naunheim said he will be committed to expanding the Society's role in advancing health care policy issues that are important to cardiothoracic surgery. "The Society is already front and center with regard to quality improvement and clinical care, but I would like for us to take a step further and help determine policy decisions on a national level," said Dr. Naunheim. "My hope is that Washington will pay closer attention to what we have to say about health care delivery and reimbursement methodology. We deserve to be heard, and with active participation, we're going to make a real difference."

Dr. Naunheim's agenda as STS President also includes continuing the diversity and inclusion initiative started by his predecessor, Richard L. Prager, MD. "I think that now is the time to turn more of our resources and attention to the issue of diversity and the ethnic, racial, and gender discrepancies within our specialty," said Dr. Naunheim. "We need to put forth efforts and resources to broaden our ranks. The more varied our membership, the more diverse the perspectives on training, research, and operative techniques will be. Such diversity can only make us stronger."

With interests in lung cancer, esophageal disease, and health policy, as well as in coding and reimbursement issues, Dr. Naunheim has authored or co-authored more than 270 peer-reviewed journal articles, abstracts, and book chapters. He also has participated in approximately 300 presentations on these topics.

"One of the proudest moments of my career is being elected as STS President," said Dr. Naunheim. "I look forward to working directly with the members because this is their Society. They are the ones who we represent and the people who, day after day, make cardiothoracic surgery the remarkable specialty that it is."

Dr. Naunheim's personal life is as busy as his professional one. He very reluctantly admits to being an amateur magician and has been an early morning runner for more than 25 years. Together with his wife of 39 years, Rosanne Naunheim, MD, they enjoy skeet shooting, traveling, antique hunting, and caring for their two oversized Leonberger dogs. They have four children and three grandchildren.

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For more information, contact STS Media Relations Manager Jennifer Bagley at (312) 202-5865 or jbagley@sts.org.

Founded in 1964, The Society of Thoracic Surgeons is a not-for-profit organization representing more than 7,100 cardiothoracic surgeons, researchers, and allied health care professionals worldwide who are dedicated to ensuring the best possible outcomes for surgeries of the heart, lung, and esophagus, as well as other surgical procedures within the chest. The Society's mission is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research, and advocacy.